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STEPHEN KING THE STAND



Soul Survivors

AGUIRRE-SACASA PERKINS MARTIN

MARVEL
LIMITED SERIES
4 of 5
PARENTAL ADVISORY

STEPHEN KING THE STAND

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PREVIOUSLY IN THE STAND

It's been over five weeks since a deadly, flu-like virus swept through the world, killing 99% of the country's population. The people who are left are tasked with living in a world they no longer understand. But, slowly, the world is moving on, and the survivors are no longer asking "what now?" but rather, "what next?"

All of them suffer from nightmares of an evil, faceless man who stalks them in their dreams. But there are other dreams—dreams of a shack in a field of corn, an old woman. In the dreams, she calls herself Mother Abigail. She plays the guitar. And she beckons them toward her, to her home in Nebraska.

Now, as the disparate parties of Nick Andros and Tom Cullen, Frannie Goldsmith and Stu Redman, and Larry Underwood and Nadine Cross (and all of the survivors who have joined them) make their way toward Nebraska, the oldest woman in America—possibly the oldest woman in the world, now—is preparing.

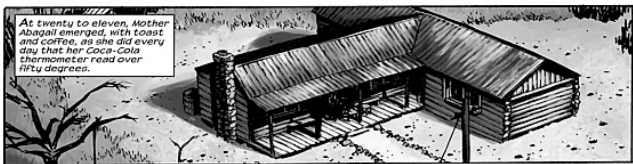
This is her story.



JULY 20th.
HEMMINGFORD HOME, NEBRASKA.



At twenty to eleven, Mother Abigail emerged, with toast and coffee, as she did every day that her Coca-Cola thermometer read over fifty degrees.



It was the finest summer she could recollect since 1955; pity more folks weren't around to enjoy it.

Though, this day and age, did they ever?



She supposed young people in love did, reveling in themselves and in warm July nights, and old folks whose bones remembered the death-clutch of winter, but...



...most everyone was gone now.



God had brought a harsh judgment down on the human race, one some people might condemn him for, but not Mother Abigail.



After all, He had done it before with water, and further along, He would do it with fire, she supposed, and anyway, it wasn't her place to judge God.

On such matters, she was satisfied with the answer God gave Moses when he asked the burning bush, *Who are you?*

I Am, Who I AM.

In other words, Moses, stop beating around this here bush and get your old butt in gear...



Mother Abigail laughed and dipped her toast into the coffee until it was soft.

She'd lost her last tooth sixteen years ago. Toothless she had come from her mother's womb, toothless she would go into her grave...



In the meantime, she wished she could sit and enjoy the cycles of the seasons. She hated that she had to be a part of what was coming next, but what do you get when you question God?

I Am, What I AM.



Even when His own Son prayed that the cup be taken from His lips, God never answered... and she wasn't anywhere near up to that snuff, no way, no how.



Just an ordinary pinner was all she was, and it frightened her to think God had looked down at her in 1992 and decided:

I got to keep her around a goodish time. She's got important work on the other side of a whole heap of calendar pages.



Her final season of work
lay ahead of her in the
West, near the Rockies.

And what did God care how
miserably afraid Abby
Freemanile was of the man
with no face, he who stalked
her dreams?

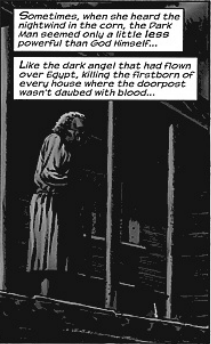


She never saw him; she
didn't have to see him.

He was a cold
pocket of air...

...a shadow passing
through the corn
at noon...

...a gore-crow
peering down from
a phone line.



Sometimes, when she heard the
nightwind in the corn, the Park
Man seemed only a little less
powerful than God himself...

Like the dark angel that had flown
over Egypt, killing the firstborn of
every house where the doorpost
wasn't daubed with blood...



Welladay.

God is great.
Thank you for the
sunshine, and for the
coffee, and for the fine
BM I had last night, you
was right, those
dates turned the
trick...

Mother Abigail turned her face
up to the warm sun and dozed.

And her heart, its walls
now as thin as tissue
paper, beat on and on...



Things had surely changed since the Freemantles had come to Nebraska as freed slaves.



Her father, John, had bought the land a smidge at a time. He'd been the first man in Polk County to try chemical fertilizer, to try crop rotation...

...and, in March of 1902, Gary Sites had come to the house to tell him he'd been the first black man in Nebraska voted into the Grange.



At twenty years of age, Abby thought she was the only one in her family (other than her daddy) who understood what a truly unprecedented thing that was.

As unprecedented as when she was asked, later that year, to play her guitar at the Grange Hall, in the white folks' talent show.

You and Sites and Frank Fenner whipped this idea up, John Freemantle, and that's fine for them, but they're white!

You talk about plowin' with 'em, and go downtown and have a beer with them, that's fine, but this is different! This is your daughter!

What are you gonna do if she gets up there and they laughs at her or throw rotten tomatoes at her? What are you gonna say when she asks why you let them do that to her?

Well, Rebecca, I guess we better leave it up to Abby and David.



David Trotts had been her first husband. A quiet, thoughtful farmhand from over Valparaiso way.

Whatever Abigail thinks is right, why...I reckon that's what to do.

Every chair was taken, plus stand-room-only.

The hall was a sea of white faces.

Including that awful Ben Conveigh, who hated her father and made nasty cracks like saying that when black babies go to heaven and get their little black wings, you call 'em bats instead of angels.

So on December 27, 1902, Abigail Freemantle Trotts, three months pregnant, stood on the Grange Hall stage in dead silence after the master of ceremonies announced her name.

To the side, pressed against the wall, under the kerosene lanterns, were her mother, father and husband.





Her heart was thudding in her chest, and she was thinking: I promised Paddy I wouldn't cry no matter what, but Mama was right, I've got above my place--

Then she stilled herself and thought:

I'm Abigail Freemantle Trotts, I play and sing well; I do not know these things because anyone told me.

And so she began to sing "The Old Rugged Cross."



Hymns led into a medley of Civil War songs, and the audience started to sway and tap their knees, almost in spite of themselves.

"When Johnny Comes Marching Home," "Marching through Georgia," "Goober Peas," ending with "Tenting Tonight on the Old Campground."



There. Now if you wanna throw your tomatas, you go ahead. I sang my best and I was real fine.



But their applause was full and sustained. Her mother was weeping, her father and husband beaming. Cries of "Encore! Encore!" filled the hall.





Thank you
all very much.
I'll sing one
more song...

"...the best song I know on account of what President
Lincoln and this country did for me and mine, even before
I was born, making it possible now for my family to be
living with the fine neighbors we have."

*Then she played and sang
"The Star-Spangled Banner,"
and everyone stood up and
listened and some cried--*

*--and when she finished,
the crowd applauded fit
to raise the roof.*

That was the
proudest day
of her life.

Yessir, 1902 had
been a topper
of a--

Welladay!

She awoke from
her nap a little
after noon.

Time to make her
way to the privy,
her grandson Victor
had put behind the
house in 1931.





Year before last, her great-granddaughter Molly and her husband Jim had wanted to put in a proper flushing toilet, but some things you couldn't let go.

And she'd had a feeling at their suggestion.

As if God had spoken to her the way he had to Noah:

Abby, you are going to need your hand-pump. Enjoy your electricity, but keep your oil-lamps full and the wicks trimmed. Keep your cold-pantry stocked. And mind you don't let the young folks talk you into anything against My will. They are your kin, but I am your Father...

She finished making water, poured lime down the hole, and came out into the yard.

The corn was going to be fine this year...

Sad and bitter for her to think that she wouldn't be at Hemmingford House to see summer give way to pagan, jocund autumn.

Please my Lord, my Lord, not unless I have to, take this cup from my lips if You can...

No answer but the creak of the rope from the tire swing and the crows off in the corn.



That night, she dreamed she was a young girl again, about to make her Grange Hall debut.

I am Abigail Freemantle Trotte, and I play and sing well; I do not know these things because anyone told me.



She began to play "Rock of Ages," thinking:

With the help of God, I am going to win them over. I will make Pavid and Mamma and Paddy proud of me, and I will bring music from the air and water from the rock and--



--and that's when she saw him, far back in the corner, and the words dried up in her mouth.





God?

Lord?



What's that *coon* doing up on our stage? No coon ever brought music from the air! No coon ever brought water from the rock!

All hell broke out, then.



She saw someone punch her husband in the mouth--

Someone else wrestling her mother down to the ground--

A third man kicking her father--



MOMMA!



And the force of her cry seemed to break the room apart--



Then she was her too-old
self again, in the mystic
corn behind her farm,
and she wasn't alone...



He spoke with the
soft voice of doom:

I have your blood in my fists,
Old Mother. If you pray to
God, pray He takes you before
you ever hear my feet coming
up your steps. It was not you
who brought music from the
air, not you who brought
water from the rock...



...your blood is
in my fists.



She woke up the hour
before dawn, covered
in a night sweat as
heavy as May dew.

My Lord, my
Lord, take this
cup from my
lips...

That morning, she set off for Addie Richardson's farm and henhouse, four or five miles away.

She was going to have company soon, and dreams or not, tired or not, she had never been one to slight company and she didn't intend to start now.



Her hope was to reach the Richardson farm by noon, sleep through the hottest part of the day, kill her chickens, then come home in the gloaming.

She wouldn't get back to Hemmingford House until after dark, and that made her think of her dream from the night before, but that man was still far away and--

My
company's
closer.

She fell to thinking
about her past again.

She'd had five children by David.
One of them, Maybelle, had choked
to death on a piece of apple in the
backyard of the Old Place.

The only one of her
children to die an
accidental death.

David died in 1913,
of an influenza not
so very different
from the one she'd
just survived.

Her second husband, Henry Hardesty, a farmer from up north, died when his tractor turned turtle on him in 1925.

A year later, she'd married Nate Brooks, one of Henry's hired men, and oh, how people had talked.

But Nate had been a good man, who had pretty much done as she'd told him.



Her six boys had produced thirty-two grandchildren, who had produced ninety-one great-grandchildren, that she knew of, and--at the time the superflu hit--three great-great-grandchildren.

She had outlived them all, and that was not the way it should be, but...the Lord had His plans.



Which is why she said what she said when she turned a hundred and they sent a TV reporter to do a story on her.

To what do you attribute your great age?

To God.



Welladay and hallelujah.



She reached the Richardson Farm completely exhausted, but needed to do one last thing before her nap.

A lot of animals had died with this disease, and she had to know if chickens were among them. (And wouldn't it be a bitter laugh if that were the case?)

But as she neared the henhouse, she heard the telltale clucking and cackling.

All right. That's good, then.

She came across Bill Richardson's body, well picked over by foraging animals.

Flights of angels sing you to y'rest, Billy Richardson.

Finally, she turned back to the cool, inviting farmhouse, for a rest and some food.

It wasn't far at all, just across the dooryard, but she was so utterly exhausted, she wasn't sure she would make it.

Lord's will be done.

When she next woke up in the guest bedroom, the light was too bright; every muscle and fragile bone in her body was in agony, and she realized, after a moment:

God A'mighty, done slep' the afternoon and the whole night through!

Limping, she went outside, crossed to the henhouse, and slipped inside--

--wincing at the hotness and the smell of decomposition. (The weakest birds had starved or been pecked to death).

Then, grunting and puffing, she dragged the three plumpest chickens--along with Billy Richardson's hatchet--to the chopping block in the yard.

Now Lord, I got me three broilers and I should like to whack off their heads and not m'own hand, Thy will be done, amen.

She thought: The only thing dumber than a broody hen was a New York Democrat--

THUNNKK

That accomplished, she put the birds into her towsack, hung Billy Richardson's hatchet where she found it, and headed back to the farmhouse to wait out the worst of the day's heat.

She napped during the early part of the afternoon and dreamed that her company was getting closer now.

Six of them, and one was a boy who was deaf and dumb, but a powerful boy, all the same.

He was the one she would have to talk to.



She awoke at three-thirty, plucked the chickens, ate a stale peanut butter sandwich, and gathered herself.

I'm off, Lord. Don't reckon to get home until midnight, but the Book says fear neither the terror of night nor that which fleeth at noonday. Walk with me, please. Jesus's sake, amen.



Two miles later, it was full dark, her strength seemed about gone...but she felt strangely exhilarated.

How long had it been since she'd been out after dark, under the canopy of stars?



A warm night like this made her remember her girlhood again, its gorgeous vulnerabilities as it stood on the edge of the Mystery. Oh, she had--



Your blood is in my flats.

A sudden sharp tug at her sack made her heart jump--





There it was, between the gravel shoulder and the corn, its eyes picking up glints of moonlight.



Another weasel joined the first.

And another.

And a fourth.

And more.

Until they lined both sides of the road.

They were smelling the chickens in her bag...

How could so many of them have crept around her?

She'd been bitten by a weasel once, when she was twelve.

She'd reached under the porch of the Big House to get a red rubber ball, and the weasel--with what felt like a mouthful of needles--had fastened on to her forearm.

It took her father beating it with a piece of stovewood before the vicious thing let go.

She'd been terrified of the creatures ever since, the way some people were of snakes or spiders, which made her think:

He had sent them--the Park Man.





One bit at the rough
hem of the trowsack--

He!



Your blood is
in my fists.



It was all for nothing, if I
don't give them my chickens,
they'll rip me to pieces.
All for nothing.

In the darkness of her mind,
she saw the Park Man smile,
his fists held out, blood
dripping from them.

Another tug at the bag.

And another.

The weasels were
squirming closer
and closer...



But whosoever believeth
in Me, behold, he shall not
perish...For I have put My
sign on him and no thing
shall touch him...he is mine,
saith the Lord...



Get
out!

It's chicken,
all right, but it's
for my company!
Now you all
git!

*The creatures' eyes
filled with unease--*



*Then drew back, away
from her, melting into
plumes of smoke--*

*A miracle, she thought,
filled with exultation for
the Lord--*

*--but then, she went
cold, suddenly.*



*Somewhere, far to the west,
beyond the Rockies, she felt
an Eye open in the sky and
turn toward her, searching.*

*Who's there? Is that
you, old woman?*



He knows
I'm here...

Oh help me,
Lord. Help me
now, help all
of us...



*But then the Eye either
closed or turned away...*

*...and Mother Abigail
resumed her walk home
again.*



JULY 24.

She began at seven in the morning with the pies. A blueberry, two strawberry-rhubarb, and an apple.

Just the act of cooking comforted her because cooking was life.



By early afternoon, her kitchen was filled with the smell of frying chicken.

It came out just as light and as nice as you could want.



After putting the chicken on paper towels, she sat on her porch and started playing her favorite hymns.

She was settling down to "We are Marching to Zion" when she heard it.



An old Chevrolet farm truck, coming down the Country Road.

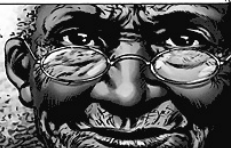
Praise God
for bringing 'em
through.

My Lord,
I thank you
so.





That's him, Mother Abigail thought. The boy who was just finishing up learning about being a man...



STEPHEN KING **THE STAND**

SOUL
SURVIVORS
ISSUE
4



SKETCHBOOK

Cover Inks for Mike Perkins' variant cover



Lee Bermejo's black and white art for this issue's cover.



**Laura
Martin on
coloring
the cover
to this
issue.**

Unlike most covers that are inked with solid black, Lee's covers often feature soft edges, airbrushed glows, and pencil shading. This makes my process a bit different. Instead of "flattening" the entire image (separating each shape into a single color) and working only on one layer, I'll choose the largest elements, and put each of those sections on its own layer.

This gives me a lot more flexibility to blend my colors with Lee's pencil shading. Here you can see the sky, corn, Abby and her guitar separated into four areas by color. (The line art is faded back to see the color details.) I could have separated her skin, hair, and kerchief, but I prefer to work on as few layers as possible.



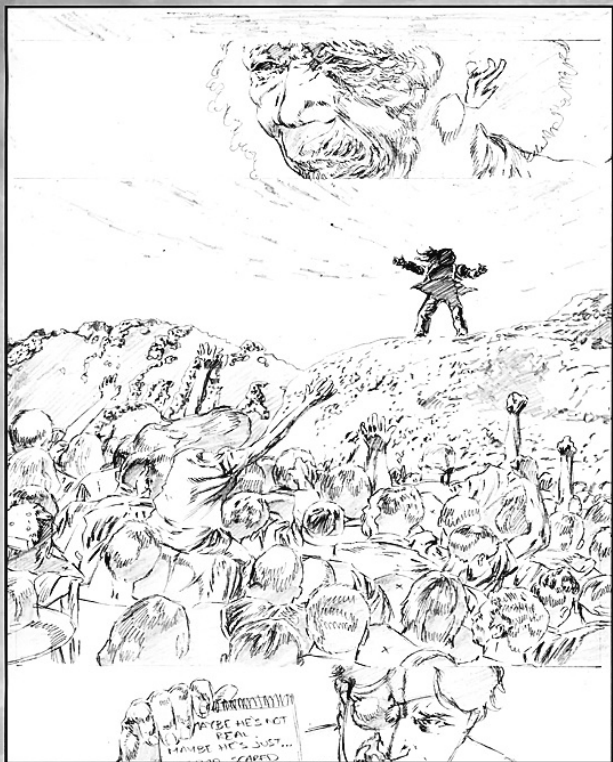
Mike Perkins' inks for pages 19 and 20 of this issue.





A few advance penciled pages by Mike Perkins from issue 5.





Two commissioned sketches of Randall Flagg by Mike Perkins.



"When I'm asked for character studies from *The Stand*, the Walkin' Dude is far and away the most popular choice."



Next: "Having your appendix out is supposed to be nothing!"
"Well, maybe not in the old days, but it's sure something now."



"If you've got a fever for riveting graphic fiction based on the biggest pop novelist of all time, the prescription is more Captain Trips."

--Rachel Molino, WIZARD MAGAZINE



The end is nigh as a deadly plague sweeps the nation and widespread panic overcomes the dying masses of America in a terrifying and inexorable tide. Who will be left to rebuild on the ruins of their past lives as the ancient rivalry of Good vs. Evil has only just begun?

Based on the popular apocalyptic novel by celebrated author Stephen King, *The Stand* brings together critically acclaimed writer Roberto Aguirre-Sacasa (*Sensational Spider-Man*, *Angel: Revelations*, HBO's *Big Love*) and the gritty visuals of artist Mike Perkins (*Captain America*) to tell a tale which begins at the end of the world.

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